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Advancement of women

Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/139, the present report reviews the activities undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities with particular focus on enabling the well-being of rural women, especially the poorest and most marginalized, through: (a) ensuring effective, sustainable and gender-responsive agricultural and rural development; (b) recognizing and redistributing rural women's unpaid care work; (c) promoting rural women's employment, decent work, and social protection; (d) ensuring rural women's access to land and productive resources; and (e) increasing rural women's food and nutrition security. This is of great relevance to the implementation of the proposed sustainable development goals, in particular the goal to end poverty in all its forms everywhere; to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; and to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (A/68/970). Recommendations are provided for consideration by the General Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 68/139 on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its seventieth session on the implementation of the resolution. In response to that request, the present report provides an assessment of the situation of rural women since the sixty-eighth session. It highlights the efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and other actors to address the obstacles and challenges that impede progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women, especially the poorest and most marginalized, and to enable them to improve their lives and livelihoods by: (a) ensuring effective, sustainable and gender-responsive agricultural and rural development; (b) recognizing and redistributing rural women's unpaid care work; (c) promoting rural women's employment, decent work, and social protection; (d) ensuring rural women's access to land and productive resources; and (e) increasing rural women's food and nutrition security. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.[1]

2. It is now widely acknowledged that rural women play a critical role in supporting their households in the achievement of food and nutrition security, in improving rural livelihoods and in generating income and overall well-being. Rural women account for a substantial proportion of the agricultural labour force, perform most of the unpaid care work and are significant actors in food production as well as in the agricultural, forestry, fisheries, and livestock sectors.[2] Yet, rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women and men for every Millennium Development Goal indicator for which data are available (E/CN.6/2014/3).

3. Despite attaining the Millennium Development Goal 1 target of reducing extreme poverty rates by half five years ahead of the 2015 deadline, 1.2 billion people continue living in extreme poverty.[3] Even if accounting for trends towards urbanization,[4] conditions of extreme poverty are largely a rural phenomenon. Extreme poverty remains unevenly distributed across rural and urban areas, between men and women, and across ages and ethnicities, but evidence suggests that extreme poverty affects many women in rural areas, a group that makes up a fourth of the world's population.[5] However, the lack of data on women's poverty and hunger limits the analysis.[6]

4. With regard to other Millennium Development Goals, rural women are at a definite disadvantage. Developing countries have achieved gender parity in primary

[1] A note verbale was circulated to all Member States and a letter was transmitted to United Nations entities soliciting contributions to the present report. Replies were received from 18 Member States (Australia, Azerbaijan, Botswana, Cambodia, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Finland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Paraguay, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sweden and the United States of America) and from two United Nations agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, whose contributions have been incorporated into the report).

[2] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women in Agriculture — Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011).

[3] Available from http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml (accessed 27 June 2015).

[4] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision* (New York, 2014).

[5] International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *Rural Poverty Report 2011* (Rome, 2010).

[6] Millennium Development Goals Gender Chart (United Nations, 2014).

education enrolment, but much remains to be done to reach universal primary completion: the time lag between boys in urban areas and girls in rural areas is projected to be long, for example, 39 years in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 46 years in Yemen, 52 years in Ethiopia and 64 years in Guinea.[7] Child marriage, which affects primarily girls, is also associated with low levels of education. Across all regions, girls in rural areas are more likely than those in urban areas to become child brides, and those in the poorest quintile are 2.5 times more likely to do so compared with the wealthiest quintile.[8]

5. Maternal deaths, which are largely preventable, are linked to inadequate health services for women, particularly in rural areas. Distance from health facilities is a major barrier for rural women. In the least developed countries, a rural woman is 38 per cent less likely than an urban woman to give birth with the assistance of a skilled health professional.[9] In Southern Asia, wealthy urban women are six times more likely to have access to the services of skilled attendants than are poor rural women (E/CN.6/2014/3). The practice of female genital mutilation/cutting is still present in at least 29 developing countries — affecting an estimated 100 million to 140 million women and girls — and the practice is more common in rural areas in the majority.[10] Worldwide, 35 per cent of women have experienced intimate-partner or non-partner violence — and up to 70 per cent of women have experienced intimate-partner violence in some countries — but the available data on violence against women does not allow for comparisons between urban and rural areas; however, some studies suggest that violence carried out by intimate partners is more prevalent in rural areas and by non-partners in urban areas.[11]

6. Although in 2012, 89 per cent of the world had access to improved sources of drinking water compared with 76 per cent in 1990, 748 million people still lacked access to clean drinking water, most of whom lived in rural areas. In contrast, 2.5 billion people, the vast majority the rural poor, lacked improved sanitation. Expenditures for rural sanitation take up approximately 10 per cent of total funding for water, sanitation and hygiene.[12] While the global electrification rate increased from 76 per cent in 1990 to 83 per cent in 2010, an estimated 1.2 billion people still did not have access to electricity.[13] More than 95 per cent of people without access to modern energy services lived either in sub-Saharan Africa or Asia, and 84 per cent lived in rural areas. Nearly 3 billion people used solid biomass to cook their

[7] Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14: Teaching and Learning: Achieving equality for all* (Paris, 2014). Available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002256/225660e.pdf.

[8] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and prospects* (New York, 2014).

[9] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015 — 2016: Transforming economies, realizing right* (New York, 2015).

[10] Population Reference Bureau, "Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Data and Trends Update 2014", http://www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2014/fgm-wallchart-2014.aspx (accessed 23 July 2015).

[11] See http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes (accessed 23 July 2015); Cathy McIlwaine, "Urbanization and gender-based violence: exploring the paradoxes in the global South," *Environment and Urbanization* 25:1, 65-79 (2013).

[12] World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation: 2014 Update (Geneva, 2014).

[13] See www.se4all.org.

meals and heat their homes, the vast majority in rural areas.[14] Indoor air pollution, produced primarily by inefficient and dirty cook stoves and fuels, causes some 4.3 million premature deaths worldwide, above all of women and children, more deaths than HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and malnutrition combined.[15] Critically, sex-disaggregated data do not exist for tracking and assessing women's access to and use of water, sanitation and energy services.

7. Rural women are at the forefront of coping with the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and post-conflict situations. The gender-differentiated impacts of those situations can intensify the constraints that place women reliant on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods at a disadvantage. As agricultural work becomes more labour-intensive or alternative sources of food and income need to be found, the burden of additional work often falls on women. Climate- and disaster-related health risks and water and fuel scarcity further add to women's unpaid care work. Women are particularly affected by changes in the availability and quality of resources during and after conflict. Women's empowerment is therefore critical for building resilience and adapting to climate change as well as for post-conflict economic recovery.[16]

8. Key findings from a forthcoming study by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Poverty and Environment Initiative[17] and the World Bank on Malawi, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania indicate that the lower agricultural productivity of women farmers compared to male farmers is the result of lack of access to key productive resources, such as land, labour, agricultural inputs, information and technology. The gender gap in agricultural productivity ranges anywhere from 4 to 40 per cent, depending on the country and the food or cash crop in question, and could cost up to $100 million in Malawi, $65 million in Uganda and $106 million in the United Republic of Tanzania.[18] The economic benefits of closing the gender agricultural productivity gap could be quite substantial. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, supported by the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development, encourages African countries to allocate 10 per cent of their national budget to agriculture; UN-Women would support setting specific targets to assist women farmers.

9. In spite of being farmers, workers, entrepreneurs, service providers, and agents of change, rural women and girls continue to face persistent structural constraints that prevent them from fully participating in socioeconomic and political life and contributing to the improvement of their circumstances. Owing to cultural and legal norms, discriminatory practices and entrenched gender and class inequalities, rural

[14] International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2011: Energy for All* (Paris, 2011).

[15] Stephen S. Lim et al., "A comparative risk assessment of burden of disease and injury attributable to 67 risk factors and risk factor clusters in 21 regions 1990-2010: a systematic analysis for the global burden of disease study 2010", *The Lancet*, vol. 380, iss. 9859 (15 December 2010), 2224-2260.

[16] UN-Women and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Women and Natural Resource Management: Unlocking the Peacebuilding Potential* (New York, 2013).

[17] Of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

[18] For further analysis of the gender gap in agriculture in Ethiopia, Niger and Nigeria, see: World Bank, *Levelling the Field: Improving Opportunities for Women Farmers in Africa* (Washington, D.C., 2014).

women and girls often have limited access to land and other productive resources, such as agricultural inputs and extension services, credit and savings, information and technology, all of which limit their economic potential. They face more difficulties than men in gaining access to public services (health, education, energy, and water and sanitation), social protection, decent employment opportunities and local and national markets and institutions. They are the most affected by malnutrition and hunger. The impact of unpaid care work on the use of rural women's time further restricts their ability to take advantage of on- and off-farm employment and market opportunities in the agricultural and other sectors.

10. The empowerment of rural women is therefore critical for the realization of their rights and to secure the well-being of their families and communities. Their contributions are vital to agricultural and rural development and local and national economies. Rural women are key to the success of virtually all the proposed sustainable development goals, not only proposed goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, but also across the framework, particularly synergies with goals 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere) and 2 (end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) (A/68/970). The political momentum generated by the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (A/66/288) and the 20th anniversary commemoration and global review process of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action[19] should enable accelerated progress in the implementation of legal and policy frameworks benefiting rural women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.[20] Building on the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals and factoring in the unequal progress between men and women and rural and urban areas, the post-2015 development agenda, supported by the Addis Ababa Accord of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (A/CONF.227/L.1), offers an unparalleled opportunity for reinvigorated commitment to gender equality and the advancement of rural women.

II. Empowerment of women in rural areas

A. Effective, sustainable and gender-responsive rural development

11. Member States have reiterated the importance of empowering rural women as critical agents for advancing agricultural and rural development through events commemorating the International Day for Rural Women in 2014 (held in Rome and in New York). In this vein, the Government of Australia is strongly encouraging women to take up more prominent leadership positions in rural communities and to participate in rural development. The government sponsors the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation Rural Women's Award, which identifies and supports emerging leaders to drive change within primary industries and advance economic and social development. The Government of Botswana began implementation of the Affirmative Action Framework for Remote Area Communities (2015-2025), coordinated by the Ministry of Local Government and

[19] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[20] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

Rural Development, covering all aspects of social wellbeing, including employment, training, and social and economic development. Such policy instruments are designed and implemented to enable rural women's empowerment and to address gender disparities and discrimination that exist across different sectors.

12. Rural women are not a homogeneous group, and their circumstances vary according to, inter alia, location, income, age, race/ethnicity, culture and religion, as well as their access to productive assets, capabilities and opportunities and the extent of their voice and agency. Specific groups, such as indigenous women, households headed by females or migrant women, may have particular needs and priorities, thus requiring policy and institutional responses that are capable of addressing this diversity with tailored approaches. In the light of the multiple and intersecting inequalities that women in rural areas face, the Ministry for Women in Paraguay has a specific set of initiatives for indigenous women, ranging from public-private partnerships to build capacity for rapid entry into the labour market to strengthening food security by encouraging the production of high-protein foods. It is also promoting sustainable agriculture and protection of agrobiodiversity by supporting women producers of stevia (*ka'ahe'e* in Guaraní) throughout the value chain, including marketing and export.

13. Supporting the full and equal participation of rural women in decision-making at all levels is necessary for the creation of more representative institutions, improved governance and the realization of women's voice, agency and rights. This would entail greater coordination between national gender machineries and line ministries as well as decentralization of gender machineries to the local level. For the past decade in Italy, the participation of women has increased in new forms of local governance, such as integrated local projects and local development plans (implemented by local action groups as part of the European Union's Leader+ initiative). In Japan, the number of women holding leadership positions is increasing, but women make up only 7 per cent of the members of agricultural committees and cooperatives. In response, the Government aims to create an environment in which women can challenge standing authorities and change the attitudes of men that may pose obstacles to women in their path towards leadership. In Jordan, the participation of women in decision-making positions in village councils and cooperatives has increased by 25 per cent as a result of the passage of the Municipalities Law of 2011.

14. In 2013, the Government of Kenya put in place the National Environmental Policy, which provides a framework for an integrated approach to environmental planning and sustainable management that mainstreams gender equality and builds incentives to attract women into environmental management. The Government has also established quotas for the membership of women on water management boards as a means of enabling them to decide matters that have implications on their quality of life and livelihoods. The Government has also established measures to strengthen local mechanisms for sustainable land rights administration and management involving rural women as key agents.

15. Recognizing women as food producers, care providers and income-earning farmers involves addressing production constraints, including lack of access to productive resources, services, information, credit and markets. Agricultural projects in Jordan have targeted rural women by engaging them in a range of agricultural, livestock, and food processing activities. Rural women have been

trained in various methods of food manufacture, leading to the creation of a number of enterprises and the formation of a women's association to promote marketing and sales, including through mobile agricultural exhibitions held all across the country where women can sell their products directly to consumers. The Government of Sweden has developed a Gender Tool Box for its international cooperation efforts, which encompasses key areas for supporting rural women's economic empowerment: women and land rights, women and food security, and women and water, sanitation and hygiene.

16. Improving sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators on access to and control over resources, assets and income, agricultural production, time use, leadership and participation is essential for implementing, monitoring, tracking and reporting progress on interventions for rural women, particularly in the light of the post-2015 development framework and the sustainable development goals. The General Statistics Directorate in Jordan has established gender-sensitive indicators for income and poverty as part of an indicator set for monitoring progress in achieving gender equality disaggregated by sector. In Kenya, the national gender machinery, in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics, produces a Gender Data Sheet every two years, which contains sex-disaggregated data on all sectors. It also released in 2013 a reporting tool for use by the public sector to report quarterly and annually on gender mainstreaming and freedom from discrimination activities. The Government of the United States of America supported the adoption of the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, which focuses on access to and decision-making power over agricultural production, assets and resources, use of income, use of time, and leadership roles in the community; the first baseline data report on 13 countries was released in May 2014.

17. In the United Nations system, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has led the way in assisting Governments to improve the availability and use of gender statistics to inform policy and programme formulation in agriculture and rural development. FAO has prepared capacity development materials for Member States to: (a) enhance the social dimension in agricultural censuses, related rural surveys and food security monitoring, including generation of relevant sex-disaggregated indicators; and (b) include an agricultural/rural dimension in the ongoing debates about gender statistics. In addition, the FAO guidelines for the 2020 World Programme for the Census of Agriculture include a special theme on intra-household distribution of ownership and managerial decisions. This allows countries to obtain gender-specific information about decision-making on agricultural holdings, as well as on the ownership by women of critical assets, such as land and livestock.

B. Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work

18. Rural women invest considerable amounts of time in unremunerated activities related to food production and processing, water and fuel collection, and care of children and the elderly. Much of this work remains informal and unpaid, and is largely unrecognized and undervalued. Women and children bear the main negative impacts of collection and transport of fuel and water, with women in many developing countries spending from one to four hours a day collecting biomass for

fuel.[21] A study of the correlation between time and water poverty in 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa estimated that women spend at least 16 million hours a day collecting drinking water; men spend 6 million hours; and children, 4 million hours.[22] Rural women spend more time than urban women and men in domestic and household work, including time spent obtaining water and fuel and processing food. Time spent by women and girls on domestic chores limits their opportunities to earn an income or attend school, thus affecting rural consumption, investment and saving.

19. The Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights provided recommendations to Member States on how to recognize, value, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, as well as adjust relevant policies and improve women's access to services and infrastructure (A/68/293). As such, public policies are needed to position care as a social and collective responsibility rather than an individual problem. New measures are required to capture women's contributions to the care economy, which tend to be unremunerated and unaccounted for in national income measures. This will entail the strengthening of capacities of national statistics offices to collect, analyse and disseminate gender-sensitive statistics on women's unpaid care work in order to increase the recognition of this work and to contribute to gender-sensitive policymaking.

20. In its resolution 68/139, the General Assembly called on Member States to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. Steps need to be taken to ensure that women's unpaid work and contributions to on-farm and off-farm production, including income generated in the informal sector, are recognized, as well as for the inclusion of women's unpaid work in official statistics. In an effort to reduce unpaid care burdens, the resolution called for investment in, strengthening access to and critical use of infrastructure (such as energy and transport), science and technology (such as time- and labour-saving technologies), local services (such as provision of safe and reliable water and sanitation) and capacity-building and human resources. Furthermore, the resolution calls for the promotion of programmes and services to enable rural women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities and to encourage men to share equally with women, household, childcare and other care responsibilities.

21. In Finland, for example, the social protection system is universal and accessible to all men and women; this translates into responsive maternity care, maternity paternity leave, child and elderly care centres and school lunch programmes, all of which potentially reduce rural women's unpaid workload. In Cambodia, a Five Year Strategy Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2014-2018) calls for increased access to day care and community kindergarten facilities, reducing the amount of time spent by rural women in providing child care so that they can dedicate efforts to income-earning activities. In Cuba, the Association for Animal Production has developed gender-responsive economic empowerment projects for rural women that involve capacity development, increased female participation in cooperatives, creation of child care facilities and provision of support to women who are performing traditionally male

[21] World Bank, *Household Cookstoves, Environment, Health and Climate Change* (Washington, D.C., 2011).

[22] World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation: 2012 Update* (Geneva, 2012).

roles. In Egypt, the State is obliged to enable women to reconcile their family duties and work requirements by providing care and protection for children, mothers and women heads of household, as well as the elderly and women in vulnerable situations, all of which affects rural women. In Japan, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is supporting rural women so that they may balance their work and parenting activities in farming villages. In the Republic of Korea, the Government provides subsidies for infant and child care in rural areas, and in 2014 provided helper services to rural families with members who had been in accidents and/or who were ill (15,118 families), housekeeping services for seniors and vulnerable families (12,285 families), and for women before and after childbirth (1,543 helpers).

22. Women in rural areas have the major responsibility for securing the household water and energy supply, which constitutes a significant part of the unpaid work burden. Improvements in infrastructure services, especially water and electricity, and a wide range of sustainable energy technologies and other innovative techniques, including improved cook stoves, rainwater harvesting schemes, efficient grinding mills and other food-processing equipment, can help free up the time spent by women on domestic work and the provision of care. Considerations of women's unpaid work burdens are particularly critical given the current context of declining supplies of water and fuel linked to deforestation, desertification and climate change, which are increasing the projected number of people who are exposed to significant water and energy stress. As part of the efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of Cambodia has invested in water supply systems, leading to a recorded increase in the rural population who have access to safe water sources from 24 per cent in 1998 to 50 per cent in 2015, thereby reducing women's unpaid care work in fetching water.

23. In Jordan, nearly complete coverage has been achieved in the percentage of homes connected to electricity and safe drinking water and sanitary disposal networks, with virtual parity between rural and urban areas. In Cuba, 3,500 rural communities have benefited from guaranteed access to potable water through the installation of some 3,000 aqueducts and the operation of windmills, water pumps and other new technologies which, in addition to reducing unpaid care work, has led to increased employment for women. In Kenya, the Government has been promoting the establishment of community water resource user associations to assist in self-regulation of water use and to develop innovative community-based methods and technologies for water harvesting, and encourages addressing gender role issues in those processes. Under the umbrella of the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy approach, FAO promotes the use of fuel-efficient stoves, alternative fuels and improved cooking practices to reduce rural people's need for firewood, thereby diminishing the related burden of unpaid care work on women and girls.

C. Employment, decent work and social protection

24. In its resolution 68/139, the General Assembly called for ensuring equal access by rural women to productive employment and decent work, social services and appropriate social protection/social security measures. It also called for the integration of increased employment opportunities for rural women into all international and national development and poverty eradication strategies.

25. The publication *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* indicates that domestic agriculture is still the main supply for food and is the principle source of income and employment in rural areas.[23] It is nonetheless important to note the growing importance of non-agricultural off-farm employment in rural areas in developing countries, for example, factories and businesses (such as bakeries, arts and crafts production, and renewable energy and provision of water, sanitation and hygiene services) as well as marketing and trading through rural cooperatives. Despite the fact that women make up some 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, agriculture alone cannot reduce rural poverty.[24] Rural off-farm employment can help households to diversify their income sources and insure themselves against economic and environmental shocks that might affect agricultural production. In addition to taking steps to support remunerative non-agricultural employment of rural women, improving working conditions on- and off-farm and promoting the full integration of women into the formal economy are essential to address the underlying structural causes of rural women's poverty and disadvantage.

26. Agricultural and rural non-farm employment are both critical for rural development, food security, poverty reduction and rural women's economic empowerment. However, decent work and productive employment remains a challenge in rural areas, which are usually characterized by labour markets with high levels of informality, labour force fragmentation, information asymmetries and the prevalence of multiple-job-holding and casual work arrangements. Rural working conditions are often deficient, with very limited access to social protection. Labour legislation is often not enforced, and rural workers are the least organized and the least protected. Among agricultural workers, women are disproportionately represented in the unskilled segment of the workforce and are often hired without a formal contract and on a temporary or seasonal basis. Both women and men have lower than average earnings in rural areas and, in absolute terms, rural women are at the bottom of the earnings ladder.[9, 25]

27. Various government interventions offer organized approaches to creating sustainable business environments and increasing labour and social protections for rural women. In the Republic of Korea, the Government has expanded subsidies for women farmers' pensions in order to raise their occupational status and empower women as co-operators of farms. The number of women receiving pension premium support rose from 126,862 women in 2013 to 146,279 in 2014 (an increase of 15.3 percent). In Finland, the Government supports farm relief services as part of a social protection programme in rural areas, which include substitute assistance, an annual leave entitlement of 26 days, subsidized help for 120 hours annually and additional services at full price. The Government also administers earnings-related pensions, which secure a reasonable consumption level for employees and self-employed persons after retirement and help to ensure basic income security for all pensioners. In Cuba, the inclusion of rural women in associations and collectives and promotion of jobs and social protection has increased the participation of women in non-State-run agriculture after legal changes in 2011. The Government of

[23] FAO, IFAD and WFP, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition* (Rome, 2014).

[24] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women in Agriculture — Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011).

[25] FAO, *Decent Rural Employment for Food Security: A Case for Action* (Rome, 2012).

Azerbaijan, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), established resource centres for improving employment opportunities for women between 25 and 60 years of age and a labour fair for rural women to access 114 job vacancies offered by 21 companies through the programme "Empowering Rural Women to Participate in Economic and Social Life".

28. Many initiatives by Governments focus on improving the productive capacity of rural women and diversifying their sources of income by providing business training. In Cambodia, women's development centres provide rural women with access to greater economic opportunities and skill development, and are exploring strategies to apply public-private partnership principles with the purpose of transforming the centres from providers of vocational training into enterprise development centres. In the United Arab Emirates, the project "Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship in the Agri-food Sector" was implemented by FAO to promote viable enterprises that are led by women in the field of agribusiness and the agrofood industry.

29. Through the EXPO Milan 2015 framework, Italy will create an estimated 2,600 women's enterprises by 2020. The Government of Italy has also put in place women's associations to support women farmers. The Government of Kenya, in partnership with the private sector, conducts training on entrepreneurship, bookkeeping and basic business administration to enable women who qualify for various catalytic funds to set up or improve their businesses. In the Philippines, the Promotion of Rural Employment through Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship Development programme provides capacity training and skills development. In Botswana, the Government promotes access by women entrepreneurs to local, regional and international markets. The Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs works with the national gender machinery to conduct annual women's expositions where women can showcase their products, network, and interact with formal business communities (enrolment has more than quadrupled since 1999). The Government also provides support to women's groups in starting income-generating activities; over the past 10 years, the Government has funded 310 groups benefitting 2,480 individuals who otherwise would have been unemployed or destitute.

D. Access to and control over land and other productive assets

30. In its resolution 68/139, the General Assembly called for ensuring the equal rights of rural women to own, control and lease land and other property, including through inheritance, as well as for them to be granted equal access to economic resources and financial services. The Committee on World Food Security's Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS 2014/41/4 Rev.1) affirm the need for "advancing women's equal tenure rights, and their equal access to and control over productive land, natural resources, inputs, productive tools" and further "promoting access to extension, advisory, and financial services, education, training, markets, and information".

31. Barriers that prevent women's access, use, and control over land and other productive resources — and the income arising from cultivation and other uses of land — are widespread and significant. They include inadequate legal and policy frameworks, ineffective implementation at national and local levels, and discriminatory cultural norms and practices. According to the Social Institutions and

Gender Index (2014) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, women and men have equal rights to own, use, and control land in only 37 per cent of 161 countries. In 59 per cent of those countries, the law guarantees women and men the same land rights; however, customary, traditional and religious practices discriminate against women and undermine the full implementation of the law. In 4 per cent of those countries, women explicitly have no legal right to own, use or control land. Not only do women have less access to land than men, but they are also often restricted to so-called secondary land rights, meaning that they hold such rights through male family members and thus risk losing those entitlements in the case of divorce, widowhood or the migration of the male relative.[26]

32. The analysis by UN-Women of World Bank data shows that significant progress was made between 1990 and 2010 in reducing legal discrimination against women regarding their ability to inherit and own assets in their own name, although progress has been uneven across regions.[9] Countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which began the period with the largest number of legal restrictions compared with other regions, have made significant strides. For example, in Botswana, the Government encourages efforts to employ positive discrimination by land boards when allocating land in remote areas, where a higher percentage is reserved for local people, including women and young girls. In Kenya, the National Land Policy, which recognizes women's right to own property, has led to the enactment of gender-responsive laws, including the Matrimonial Property Act (2013), which safeguards the rights of women to own property, both during and upon the dissolution of marriage.

33. For rural women and men, land is perhaps the most important household asset to support production and provide for food, nutrition and income security. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security embrace gender equality as one of the main guiding principles of implementation and stress the importance of compliance in all programmes, policies and technical assistance to improve governance of tenure. In China, for example, in order to implement the central authority's policies on the management and transfer of contracted rural land, the Ministry of Agriculture requires relevant departments to conduct registration and certification work to safeguard the land rights and practical concerns of rural women. Rural women's names are recorded on the register as well as on the land certificate, which assures their legal rights. In Cambodia, a land-titling programme under the 2001 Land Law empowers women through joint titling and ensuring rights that are equal to men's in the case of divorce, and inheritance rights in the case of death. In the Philippines, 674,486 women have been provided with Certificate of Land Ownership Awards.

34. With the objective of providing lessons and good practices related to the adoption and effective implementation of laws, policies and programmes on women's rights to land and other productive resources, UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights produced a handbook in 2013, *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources*. The FAO Gender and Land Rights Database analyses the extent to which national legal

[26] FAO, "Gender and land rights", Economic and Social Perspectives Policy Brief No. 8 (Rome, 2010).

frameworks and policies and programmes support the advancement of women or induce gender-differentiated access to land in 84 countries.

35. Since the food crisis in 2007 and 2008, and a follow-up surge in global food prices in 2010 and 2011,[27] an increase in demand for food, combined with a growing demand for biofuel and other commodities, has encouraged large-scale acquisitions of land by foreign and domestic investors in developing countries — encompassing millions of hectares of land over the past decade. This trend has dire implications for local communities and livelihoods, particularly for rural women. A recent study of such processes worldwide revealed that rare and limited gains were overwhelmed by social exclusion, dispossession and gender inequalities. First, in none of the cases examined did women have any decision-making power in the planning of projects or negotiation of resettlement and rehabilitation. Second, discriminatory compensation and resettlement almost universally reproduced women's lack of land rights by allocating compensation plots to male heads of households. Third, as women are the most dependent on common property resources for work and income in most agrarian contexts, they are the most affected by the enclosure of land, the destruction of commons and the resulting losses of livestock. Fourth, land dispossession was correlated with increased violence, putting women's physical security particularly at risk. Finally, in all cases, women recognized the threats that dispossession posed for their well-being and played important roles in opposing large-scale land acquisition (A/69/156).

36. Women farmers also face limited access to agricultural inputs and extension services as compared with their male counterparts, which compromises their productivity and food and nutritional security. In Kenya, the Government offers reductions in the taxes on fertilizers and other agricultural inputs, which greatly benefits poor women, who make up the majority of food producers. In 2014, the Feed the Future programme of the Government of the United States of America enabled smallholder farmers, including women, in targeted countries to earn more than $530 million in new sales of agricultural products, a threefold increase over the previous year. In response to challenges faced by rural women in accessing technology, UN-Women, FAO, IFAD, WFP and the African Union organized a Sharefair in October 2014 on the theme "Rural women's technologies to improve food security, nutrition and productive family farming." Several partners, including the Regional Network on Gender and Rural Livelihoods for Eastern and Southern Africa, promoted innovative technologies that support women smallholder farmers. Its South-South component brought together rural women innovators from around the region, and offered them a platform to interact with policymakers, academics, food manufacturers, investors, technology experts and others.

37. Access to financial services enhances economic development and can play a key role in reducing poverty in rural areas. Yet access to credit, savings, insurance and remittance facilities is usually limited in rural areas. Furthermore, capacity constraints on both the supply and the demand sides, such as the insufficient number of products tailored to rural needs and limited financial literacy, make the availability of financial services in rural areas even scarcer. Women's access to financial services is constrained by lack of collateral and discriminatory legal, customary and cultural norms. The Global Financial Inclusion Database (Global

[27] FAO Food Price Index, available from http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/ (accessed 28 June 2015).

Findex) shows that women, the poor, youth and rural residents are at the greatest disadvantage. The 2014 Global Findex reports that between 2011 and 2014, 700 million adults became account holders, increasing the percentage of the world's adult population with an account from 51 to 62; the number of those without an account — "the unbanked" — dropped by 20 per cent to 2 billion adults. Clear rural-urban disparities exist, with rural areas in low-income countries showing very low numbers of formal bank accounts. Furthermore, although 47 per cent of women in low-income countries have bank accounts, only 22 per cent in rural areas hold accounts.[28]

38. Initiatives to improve rural women's skills at management of their finances have become more common, and the availability of information on financial sector development worldwide, including the status of women, has contributed to policymakers' and stakeholders' being better informed. Strengthening the access of rural women to adequate financial services entails the identification of policy solutions that can support the expansion of financial inclusion, taking advantage of new technologies to overcome barriers and reach underserved segments of the population in rural areas.

39. To help women with financial shortfalls in developing their entrepreneurial enterprises, the Ministry of Finance of China, the Bank of China and the All-China Women's Federation are implementing a low-interest secure loan policy for women, which provides start-up funds with a maximum loan amount of up to 100,000 Yuan per capita for rural women. In Jordan, the Agricultural Credit Corporation seeks to reduce rural women's poverty by granting loans to support and develop the agriculture sector; the percentage of loans obtained by women in 2009-2014 ranged between 57 to 64 per cent of the total. The Government of Azerbaijan, through the State Agency on Agricultural Credits, is meeting the challenge of financial inclusion by allocating loans to 53,000 rural women (39.2 per cent of the total). In Egypt, the Ministry of State for Local Development supports rural women by providing flexible loans, along with training and technical assistance to run small- and medium-sized businesses, and new marketing opportunities through exhibitions of women's products for local and foreign markets. The National Council for Women, in collaboration with the Ministries of State for Administrative Development and the Interior, UN-Women, UNDP and several non-governmental organizations and governorates, has helped to issue national identification cards to enable rural women to access government services, including loans and credit facilities and services. In Paraguay, the Agricultural Loans Facility emphasizes the financial inclusion of rural women, offering financial products that meet local needs, such as a community bank that loaned $580,170 to 1,676 women and 533 men between January and April 2015. The Government of Kenya through the Women Enterprise Fund has allocated Kshs 4.5 billion ($50.6 million) in loans to 864,920 women borrowers since 2007, while over 404,800 women have received training in business management skills, and 52 savings and credit cooperatives have been registered. The scheme uses a mobile phone loan repayment system, in partnership with private-public actors.

[28] Available from http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/globalfindex (accessed 28 June 2015).

E. Food and nutrition security

40. The Addis Ababa Accord on FfD has declared: "It is unacceptable that close to 800 million people are chronically undernourished and do not have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. With the majority of the poor living in rural areas, we emphasize the need to revitalize the agricultural sector, promote rural development, and ensure food security, notably in developing countries, in a sustainable manner, which will lead to rich payoffs across the sustainable development goals. We will support sustainable agriculture, including forestry, fisheries and pastoralism.... [W]e will strengthen our efforts to enhance food security and nutrition and focus our efforts on smallholders and women farmers, as well as on agricultural cooperatives and farmer's networks." It is the case that rural women and men often play different roles in guaranteeing food security for their households and communities. Women tend to raise small livestock and grow and prepare most of the food consumed in the household, while men tend to grow mainly cash crops for the market. Yet even though women are the main producers of food in many developing countries, persisting barriers prevent them from fully contributing to food and nutrition security and cause them to suffer disproportionately from hunger and malnutrition.

41. According to *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, in the 2012-2014 period the prevalence of undernourishment fell from 18.7 to 11.3 per cent globally and from 23.4 to 13.5 per cent for the developing countries. However, eradicating hunger remains a major global challenge. The latest estimates indicate that 805 million people were chronically undernourished in 2012-14, with insufficient food for an active and healthy life. The vast majority of hungry people live in developing regions, which saw a 42 per cent reduction in the prevalence of undernourished people between 1990-92 and 2012-14.[23] Nevertheless, the growth of between one out of four children worldwide is stunted, which is evidence of long-term undernutrition that compromises mental and physical development. Nearly half of all deaths of children under the age of five are attributable to undernutrition.[29] Anaemia, caused by poor nutrition and deficiencies of iron and other micronutrients, affects 42 per cent of all pregnant women globally and contributes to maternal mortality and low birth weight. However, limitations of national and global data sets mean there is very little information on the gender dimensions of hunger. Data gaps pose a major obstacle to gender analysis and for the monitoring of food and nutrition security. Sex-disaggregated data are collected only at the national level on a limited number of internationally comparable indicators, such as body mass weight and certain micronutrient deficiencies (A/69/156).

42. Steps have been taken by Member States and the international development community to ensure food and nutrition security in rural communities, taking gender considerations into account. In Cuba, a collaboration among UNDP, the Centre for Women's Studies and others on the "Gender equality with quality management for food security," programme recognizes and promotes quality systems and practices that favour gender equality in agriculture and food security. The Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Family Planning in Djibouti addresses malnutrition by providing income-generation opportunities to women farmers. The Government of Japan has promoted the improvement of the situation

[29] Available from http://data.unicef.org/nutrition/malnutrition (accessed 28 June 2015).

of women in rural areas based on the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas and the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society since 1999. In 2013, the Feed the Future programme of the United States of America helped over 7 million smallholder farmers access new tools and technologies to improve yields and boost incomes, reached 12.5 million children with nutrition interventions, and provided support to nearly 91,000 women farmers in homestead gardening, thereby improving access to nutrient-dense foods and increasing income for women and children. Through the joint programme "Renew Efforts to Address Child Hunger and Under-Nutrition (REACH)", FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO) help national governments to plan, prioritize and manage nutrition actions among multiple stakeholders. By engaging different sectors, the REACH programme has helped to build and strengthen national programmes to overcome child and maternal under-nutrition in 16 countries.[30]

43. In 2014, FAO developed an e-learning course on "Gender in Food and Nutrition Security" aimed at strengthening the capacities of national and international policymakers and development practitioners to design and implement policies and programmes that are gender-responsive and sustainable. Recognizing that climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation pose serious threats to food and nutrition security, and in response to the dearth of quality data and information on the gender dimensions, the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research Programme on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security produced a "Gender and Inclusion Toolbox: Participatory Research in Climate Change and Agriculture" to support diagnostic and action research for gender sensitive and socially inclusive climate change programmes in the rural development context.[31] The UNDP Rio+ World Centre for Sustainable Development has also made the case for incorporating gender concerns into the nexus of gender, climate and agriculture policies to further gender equality in the context of sustainable development.[32]

III. Conclusions and recommendations

44. **Member States and United Nations entities have implemented measures to improve the situation of rural women, expanding their access to employment, entrepreneurship, training and leadership opportunities, social services and protection, and land and productive resources. They have also taken steps to recognize, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work on women. Despite some progress in improving their status, the majority of rural women worldwide still live in difficult conditions. The challenges they face have been amplified by the combined impact of the economic and financial crises, volatile energy and food prices, demographic changes, conflicts, climate change, large-scale land deals, and lack of investment in rural and agricultural development.**

[30] Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

[31] C. Jost, N. Ferdous, T. D. Spicer, *Gender and Inclusion Toolbox: Participatory Research in Climate Change and Agriculture*. Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research Programme on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security, CARE International and the World Agroforestry Centre (Copenhagen, 2014).

[32] Leisa Perch and Rosaly Byrd, Gender in the Climate-Smart Agriculture Discourse: Making the case for gender-smartness," Rio+ Centre Working Papers, 2015.

45. **While important progress has been made in many countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including the gender goals and targets,[6] rural women have scored lowest compared with women in urban areas and with rural and urban men. More robust gender-responsive approaches and greater investment in rural development and rural women are needed in the post-2015 framework. Rural women are key to achieving virtually all the proposed sustainable development goals. Rural women are critical agents of change, whose economic empowerment will make substantial contributions to local and national economies, social development, environmental management, and a fair and just world for all.**

46. **Member States are encouraged to implement the following recommendations, presented for consideration by the General Assembly, to improve the situation of women in rural areas:**

(a) **Take action on existing commitments to rural development and rural women's empowerment and human rights, in particular the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its 20-year global review (E/CN.6/2015/3), and looking forward to the proposed sustainable development goals and the fulfilment of the Addis Ababa Accord on Financing for Development;**

(b) **Integrate gender perspectives into national rural and agricultural development plans and programmes, where lacking, and ensure coordination between gender machineries and line ministries at all levels;**

(c) **Ensure rural women's full and equal rights to land and inheritance, land tenure security, common property and common resources, and equal access to justice and legal support, by designing, reviewing and implementing relevant laws and policies, including those for civil registration;**

(d) **Increase public and private investment in rural women to close the gender gap in agriculture, and support women smallholder farmers with improved access to extension and financial services, agricultural inputs, markets and innovative technologies;**

(e) **Mitigate post-conflict situations and impacts of climate change by ensuring rural women's full participation and decision-making in natural resource governance;**

(f) **Ensure equal access to decent work in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, including in sustainable enterprises and cooperatives; design and implement gender-responsive social protection; and improve rural women's skills and capacities through technical and vocational training;**

(g) **Recognize, reduce and redistribute the unpaid care work burden of rural women by investing in relevant infrastructure, public services and time- and labour-saving technologies, and by promoting women's paid employment in the care economy;**

(h) **Develop and implement gender-responsive climate-resilient agricultural production for food and nutrition security; and support rural and indigenous women in the conservation and sustainable use of traditional crops and biodiversity;**

(i) Increase the capacity of national statistical offices and other relevant institutions to collect, analyse and disseminate sex- and age-disaggregated data and produce gender statistics on time use, land tenure, water, sanitation, energy, among others, to support policies and action to improve the situation of rural women and monitor and track implementation of the sustainable development goals.

47. **The United Nations system and other international organizations are encouraged to support Member States to:**

(a) Design and implement effective, sustainable and gender-responsive rural and agricultural development policies and programmes;

(b) Recognize, reduce and redistribute women's and girls' unpaid care work in rural areas;

(c) Develop and implement policies and programmes to promote women's access to decent work opportunities, including on and off-farm employment;

(d) Plan, design and implement gender-responsive social protection schemes that focus on rural women; and

(e) Collect, analyse and disseminate sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender statistics on rural women's access to and control over land and other productive assets, the distribution and value of unpaid care work, entrepreneurship, and access to decent work and social protection.